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## Redefining professional identity: the voice of a language teacher in a context of collaborative learning

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Following a narrative and biographic approach, in this study, we present the case of an in-service language teacher and her professional learning trajectory in the context of the project ‘Languages and education: constructing and sharing training’. This project aimed at the construction of a collaborative teacher education context for learning and transformation of experiences, views and practices in language education, and involved teachers, teacher educators and researchers. Based on a single case study, the analysis tries to disclose the teacher’s discursive displacements as hints of professional transformation while she reinterprets the learning taking place in the collaborative education process. The signs of change are visible in the way she constructs meanings regarding her professional identity, re-identifies her mission as a language teacher and reconsiders her professional identity. Finally, we reflect upon how collaborative teacher education scenarios may foster teachers’ personal professional learning and renewed self-images.

**Keywords:** autobiographic documents; collaborative learning; in-service teachers; language education; professional development

### 1. Introduction

There is a considerable amount of literature dedicated to the topic of teachers’ professional identity and its formation. Over the years, this topic has received increasing attention in teacher education and studies have embraced several theoretical underpinnings and research foci (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Rodgers and Scott 2008). Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) reveal the existence of specific trends in the research on professional identity: (i) studies which focus on the professional identity formation of future teachers or early career teachers; (ii) studies reporting to how teachers or teacher educators represent their identities in the stories they tell or write; and (iii) studies that focus on the identification of the characteristics of teachers’ professional identity. Bouchard and Chevrier (2000) also refer to central themes on the topic of teacher professional identity: the influence and the role of particular dimensions (such as the personal trajectory, experience from practice, social context, lay theories and personal ambitions) in the construction of professional identity, and the tools contributing to trainee teachers’ professional identity awareness and development.

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Particularly in the field of language teacher education and identity formation, one of the issues that needs to be addressed is how language teachers' professional identity evolves over time in a dialogue with recent perspectives of language education, such as plurilingual and intercultural education (Beacco and Byram 2007), which calls for the construction of other frameworks of thought and action, of new references, attitudes and skills. It is hoped that these frameworks foster a communication that is respectful and mindful of linguistic and cultural diversity, seeing it as an enriching and creative factor in everyday existence. The enactment of plurilingual and intercultural education demands of language teachers, the ability to revise their teaching epistemology and practice, as well as their professional identity that is, their self-image as language teachers, their professional mission and project as educational actors (Pinho 2008). In this process, language teachers need to interpret and revise previous mindsets. Understanding this can be crucial to the development of teacher education settings that may facilitate the process of teachers gaining the 'authority to shape their own professional paths and identities' (Rodgers and Scott 2008, 733).

If teacher education is to be a setting for the development of teachers' professional identity, learning environments need to be more meaningful for teachers and appropriate to their contexts of work and to the challenges they face. Consequently, professional learning paths need to focus on the *person* and his/her personal and professional trajectories, so that teachers can construct new ways of relating to the world, others and themselves (Pinho et al. 2011). Of particular interest in this context is a major conclusion of the literature review about professional identity by Rodgers and Scott (2008, 751), namely that 'teachers should, in fact, make sense of their experiences at a particular level of development', so that they may be more self-critical and self-authoring of their own projects according to their convictions and intentionality in view of the 'normative contextual and relational forces that shape their identities' (*idem*, 737). This would mean teachers having a voice and being agents of their own identity, namely by means of self-awareness and reflection. Bearing in mind that identity is a relational phenomenon (Rodgers and Scott 2008), teacher collaboration and communities are seen as important features of teacher education programmes, which intend to foster identity formation and development based on collective reflection and a culture of inquiry (Westheimer 2008).

In this article, we analyse the narrative written accounts of an in-service language teacher as a single case study (Yin 2009). Such reflective written accounts were written in the context of the learning scenario about plurilingual and intercultural education designed in the project 'Languages and education: constructing and sharing training', which articulated a collaborative dimension of learning with a personal one. Considering that identity is 'dependent upon the contexts in which we immerse ourselves' (Rodgers and Scott 2008, 734), such as teacher education programmes, it is our intent to give a deep qualitative picture of the teacher's professional learning in that setting, showing how such learning helped her to give new meanings to her teaching trajectory, reanalyse her self-image and rethink her professional mission as language teacher. Ultimately, this case enables us to critically reflect upon collaborative teacher education scenarios, and how these may foster teachers' personal professional learning and renewed self-images.

## 2. Theoretical and contextual background

### 2.1. Professional identity: a narrative process in collaborative learning contexts

In a literature review about professional identity in learning to teach, Rodgers and Scott (2008) highlight four assumptions of identity, by referring to the contextual, relational and emotional, shifting and multiple, and storied nature of identity. According to them,

identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple *contexts* which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation; (...) is formed in *relationship* with others and involves *emotions*; (...) is *shifting, unstable, and multiple*; and (...) involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through *stories* over time. (Rodgers and Scott 2008, 733)

The present study is set in the narrative and biographic approaches to teachers' professional identity, and values the power of reflective practices and accounts to teachers' professional learning (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). As explained by Søreide, 'to understand identity construction as a process of narrative positioning is useful, because it opens up an understanding of teachers as active agents in their own lives and the construction of teacher identity as a dynamic and changing activity' (2006, 529). In this perspective, the interpretative role of storytelling is emphasised and identity is seen as a continuous work of interpretation of life and oneself in a dialogue with others. Thus, the accounts teachers relate about themselves over time play an educative role, which is essential to their self-knowledge and understanding (Ricoeur 1990).

As Ricoeur (1990) asserts in his perspective of narrative identity, it is by means of the mediating role of storytelling that the individual is able to re-configure his/her experience, what stays the same (continuity) and what changes or needs to be changed (discontinuity), and identifies what seems to be the most adequate and meaningful course of action to his/her professional life over time. These ideas also resonate in the words of Rodgers and Scott (2008), who emphasise the shifting nature of identity, since this is shaped by contexts and relationships. Consequently, continuity and coherence in identity formation and development can be achieved by the practice of narrative, which may enable teachers to gain control of their trajectories and be able to find their *voice* in the 'confluence of forces that compete for a teacher's allegiance: the schools and universities in which she works and learns, her past experiences and identities as a learner, and her desires and images of herself as a teacher' (Rodgers and Scott 2008, 737). Accordingly, teachers' knowledge is narrative-based and depends on teachers' conceptualising, finding explanations and sharing meanings with others about their trajectories and practice. Narration thus helps teachers to make sense of their experiences over time, by linking past, present and future (Clandinin and Connelly 1995).

Josso (2002) states that identity takes the form of a life project whose development is grounded in the knowledge teachers have of who they are, what they think, value and wish professionally. Such knowledge is fostered by means of dialogic processes with themselves, others and contexts. Gohier and Anadón (2000) also stress the role of reflection and narration in teachers' professional identity construction. The authors state that such processes help teachers to elaborate their self-image with regard to their work, their learners and colleagues, and other educational actors involved in schools. Such narrative dimension of identity is clearly stated in the following words:

teachers personal identity can be brought to self-awareness through narrative self-reflection. [...] Self-knowledge not only assumes that one can establish one's own personal identity by means of stories, but also assumes that one can be accountable narratively for how one has developed as a person, as a teacher – for how one has become what one has become. [...] by means of stories, teachers justify the manner in which their character, wishes and interests have grown and changed as a result of past circumstances, decisions, and formative experiences in specific circumstances. (Withrell and Noddings 1991, in Leitch 2006, 550)

The process of self-knowledge, which is fostered by narration, is crucial to teachers finding self-direction and developing a sense of belonging to particular professional communities (Pinho 2008). It supports them in becoming aware of the real possibilities of their projected self-image as teachers. The idea of temporality and plurality is fundamental (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Dominicé 2006; Josso 2002), namely because social changes force teachers to ruptures and destabilisation. As Nóvoa explains,

'Identity is a place of struggles and conflicts, it is a place for construction of ways of being and acting in the profession. [...] It is a process that requires *time*. A time to re-establish identities, to accommodate innovations, to assimilate changes', in which the individuals 'take ownership of their personal and professional history'. (1992, 16)

Moreover, when teachers narrate, they somehow unveil the interplay between their ideal self (their own aspirations and those of others towards them), the ought self (the sense of duty and responsibility resulting from the norms of the professional culture) and the actual, situational self (their self-image, and the representation of others about them at a given point in time) (Lauriala and Kukkonen 2003).

In addition, the narrative approach in teacher education also highlights the sociological and collaborative dimension of teachers' identities (Dubar 1996; Gohier and Anadón 2000; Rodgers and Scott 2008). In other words, professional identity is a result of the interplay between self-knowledge and the contexts in which teachers come to know (Clandinin and Connelly 1995; Craig 2011). According to Dubar (1996), identity is a result of a double transaction with others and oneself. It is simultaneously a relational and biographic construction, which occurs within a complex communication and negotiation process. The dialogue with others becomes not only a place for teachers' cognitive construction (in terms of propositional and practical knowledge), but also a *locus* of meaning-making about oneself, which can feed the reshaping of one's self-image as teacher, and the identification of new directions to one's teaching (Pinho 2008). As such, professional identity implies 'the art of sociability' (Josso 2002), which means connecting and sharing experience with others in processes and contexts of collaborative learning. In this sense, collaborative learning becomes valuable to the generation of other 'stories to live by' (Clandinin 2006; Craig 2011) and needs to be incorporated in teacher education programmes.

If fact, collaborative dynamics, such as professional learning communities (Wenger 1998; Westheimer 2008) are considered to be crucial to the development of new ways of thinking and acting. It is believed that these collective learning contexts become catalysts for joint reflection, experience sharing or new understandings about language teaching, as well as for risk-taking and innovation in the development of new practices, particularly when they are situated in the teachers' work contexts and have direct implications for them. Following Westheimer (2008), in

collaborative settings, several discourses, practices and experiences about language education can emerge, which can provide complementary sets of lenses through which teachers can analyse their mindsets, look at their school lives, discuss beliefs, identify tensions, set new understandings and revise their mission as teachers.

Also, Westheimer (2008) explains that collaborative learning can be a way of reducing alienation, because teachers can learn from one another, and this interpersonal contact can feed teachers' awareness of the forces and norms which may be constraining their professional project. Such fellowship can be crucial to teachers experiencing a sense of membership and belonging to a particular professional community and shared discourse about language education. As Wenger (1998, 145) asserts, 'our identity includes our ability and inability to shape the meanings that define our communities and our forms of belonging', and therefore 'Building an identity consist of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities'. Thus, being part of a community that requires engagement, compliance with particular values and alignment in the negotiation of shared practices and understandings. According to the author, such work of alignment entails particular processes, namely 'negotiating perspectives, find common ground', 'convincing, inspiring, uniting', 'walking boundaries, creating boundary practices, reconciling divergent perspectives' or also 'defining broad visions and aspirations, proposing stories of identity' (Wenger 1998, 186–187). Bearing all this in mind, it is of particular importance to understand how language teachers re-interpret the negotiated meanings in the context of collaborative settings and communities focused on plurilingual and intercultural education, and develop their professional identities.

It is believed that this collaborative dimension of professional learning needs to be articulated with more personal ways of knowing in teacher education (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Craig 2011). Thus, teacher education strategies based on life stories, narratives and accounts can strongly support more personal interpretations of collaborative experience and lead to an increased self-awareness, which is crucial to professional learning and identity construction. This perspective was adopted in the project 'Languages and education', which combined collaborative learning practices with more individual reflective ones, as a way of supporting the development of teachers' professional identity in view of plurilingual and intercultural education.

## 2.2. *The 'Languages and education' project*

The project 'Languages and education: constructing and sharing professional knowledge' was a research project about teacher education developed between 2007 and 2010. In this project, collaborative research and professional development in language education were seen as powerful means of developing a working culture capable of transforming the work of teachers, teacher educators and researchers, as well as a prerequisite for environments and networks of innovation and creativity in (research in) language education. The project involved 51 schoolteachers and 23 researchers and language educators.

The setting up of the project involved building a professional development community (PDC) consisting of teachers of various levels of education (from the early years of schooling to secondary education), teacher educators and researchers with the purpose of (i) promoting the development of a culture of collaboration between research, teacher education and the practices of language teaching; (ii) contributing to the personal and professional development of its members; and (iii) stimulating

reflection on language education practices, with a view to its improvement/innovation.

This collaborative environment was organised around thematic working groups (WG) with 10–20 participants each. The WGs were organised around three courses on language education: reading, writing, and plurilingual and intercultural education. These courses took place during the academic year 2008/2009, accounted for 75 h of work (face-to-face and autonomous) and were incorporated into a *blended learning* approach using the Moodle platform. The face-to-face sessions ran for seven sessions and were scheduled and distributed throughout the year. They were designed to be a sharing space not only within the WGs but also between the different groups.

In each, WG members were organised in small sub-groups, which focused on sub-themes they jointly considered relevant to their professional learning. These sub-themes resulted in collaborative action-research projects that would be carried out in schools. Overall, 15 joint projects were developed, which were implemented in the schools of the district.

In summary, the training and collaborative professional development was carried out in relation to the work (i) in a PDC (a meeting place where groups gathered, among other activities, to give presentations of the work undertaken, attend conferences and engage in debates on topics of interest to the community members) and (ii) within the WG context (where the professional learning objectives and joint work plan to be developed were defined and carried out) (for further details, see Andrade and Pinho 2010a, and the project's webpage <http://linguaseeducacao.web.ua.pt/>).

### 3. The study

The study in this article is based on the analysis of the narrative written accounts of an in-service language teacher that participated in the project 'Language and education', namely in the WG about plurilingual and intercultural education. Particularly, our interest is to understand the teacher's (re)construction of her self-image and mission as teacher, and the implications of eventual transformations to the identification of new directions to her future action.

The focus on a single case (Yin 2009) derives from the fact that although learning is socially constructed, it is deeply linked to each individual's personal trajectory within social environments. Consequently, despite granting some kind of qualified or fuzzy generalisation when the case is added to other cases, each case is singular (Bassey 1999). The analysis of this particular case is instrumental (Stake 2000), since it is used to gain insight about how language teachers in the particular context of the project and WG underwent processes of professional transformation.

In order to situate the written accounts, in this section, we describe the dynamics of the WG in which the language teacher was involved, as well as the purpose and the instructions given to the writing of the accounts. This description is then followed by the explanation of the study's methodological procedures.

#### 3.1. *The in-service language teacher's context of training – the WGA*

The in-service language teacher analysed in this study belonged to one of the working groups of the 'Languages and education' project, referred to as the WGA, which



was organised around the workshop ‘Collaborating in practices of plurilingual and intercultural education and awareness: opportunities for professional development’.

The purpose of the group was to collaboratively learn about how to develop a culture of plurilingualism in schools, namely by promoting awareness of diversity in its many aspects (Beacco and Byram 2007; Coste, Moore, and Zarate 1997). The group members together (a total of 17 in-service primary teachers and language teachers and 11 teacher educators/researchers) chose the theme ‘Migrations and mixtures as movements and encounters’ as a joint project. This organising theme gave place to different approaches depending on the various sub-groups.

Thus, the WGA was organised into four sub-groups, consisting of members of different educational institutions (from primary to higher education), working in formal (classroom) and non-formal situations (language clubs). The work within these sub-groups was guided by specific research questions, but with shared theoretical frameworks, as systematised in Table 1. The four sub-projects followed a collaborative action-research perspective (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

The teacher reported on the present study belonged to sub-group/project 2 – ‘Languages and cultures: migrations and (dis)encounters’, which involved four language schoolteachers and two teacher educators/researchers. According to the participants’ common interests, the group decided to develop the project in three classes, which belonged to different schools: Spanish (8th grade), French (10th grade) and English (11th grade). To design the project, they analysed and compared the language syllabi, in order to find connections and develop a cross-curricular project based on the theme of migrations. To theoretically sustain the project, all group members read about language policies, inclusive and intercultural education,

Table 1. Sub-groups and projects of WGA.

Subgroup and project	Educational context	Research and pedagogical questions
1. Sea of languages and cultures	1st cycle of basic education (1st to 4th grade)	How to raise the pupils’ awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity?
2. Languages and cultures: migrations and (dis)encounters	3rd cycle of basic education (7th to 9th grade) and Secondary Education	How to pedagogically work the theme of migrations in order to foster the valuing of linguistic and cultural diversity?
3. From my language one can see the ocean. And from the others?	3rd cycle of basic education (7th to 9th grade) and secondary education	What representations do students have of their mother tongue(s) and of the studied foreign language (English) in different teaching levels? How do these representations evolve?
4. Languages: pathways to the Other	Extra-curricular spaces (School language clubs)	What strategies of awakening to languages and cultures and fostering of linguistic culture can be carried out in extra-curricular spaces?

Shared key-words: Awakening to languages and cultures; plurilingual competence; intercultural competence; migrations; exclusion/inclusion; representations.



migration dynamics, and stereotypes and social representations. During the project's implementation in the several schools, data were collected to support joint post-action critical reflection and the writing of the group's final report.

Being part of WGA, this teacher's working group shared the project's progress with the other sub-groups over the year. In a final stage, the project's results were presented to the whole 'Language and Education' community at a colloquium. In order to disseminate the joint project and results at the event, the group also produced a poster, an abstract and a paper.

At particular moments during the year, each schoolteacher wrote narrative accounts with the purpose of reflecting on the collaborative dynamics in course, but also about themselves and their self-image as teachers.

### **3.2. *The narrative written accounts: clarifications***

As already mentioned, the teacher education scenario created in the context of the project 'Language and education' and its WGs privileged a reflective dimension grounded on a narrative and biographic perspective of teachers' learning. Therefore, each teacher had his/her own portfolio, which was made up of an *individual* component (teacher's personal characterization, narrative written reflections (WR), reading syntheses) and a *collective* component (description of the intervention project and respective materials and final report of the sub-group).

Of particular interest to the present study are the three narrative accounts that each teacher wrote at significant times during the education period (in the initial, intermediate and final phases along the timeline of the workshop). They corresponded to three crucial moments: the first account was written in February 2009 (at the end of the first term); the second one in May 2009 (at the end of the second term and middle phase of the training programme) and the last written reflection in July 2009, which matched the final moment of the workshop and the appraisal of the whole process.

Note that while the first written account was free and with no suggestion of topics for reflection, the next two were guided. So, in the case of the second account, teachers were asked to report on their professional learning within the WG, the project's development and the workshop's dynamics. The suggested topics were: teacher's personal/professional trajectory; the project workshop; role of research; effects on their teaching conceptions and practices; (dis)advantages of collaborative work; and suggestions and future developments.

The third reflection was less guided, and the teachers were asked to give a critical appraisal of the whole process, while considering the following question: If these community and workshop were to start now, how would you like them to be carried out? What would you repeat, and what would you alter?

Although these reflections could be shared with the whole WGA, they were mainly written to teacher educators and researchers. These adopted the role of 'critical friends' and gave feedback, with the intent of fostering teachers' reflection in more multidimensional and complex ways. The teacher educators' comments or questions, together with the general instructions for the second and third accounts, served as a prompt for the reflections and supported teachers' learning.

Moreover, each teacher wrote a personal characterisation at the beginning of the course, which was revised and enriched at the end according to what the teacher considered relevant to be added.

### 3.3. Methodological details of the study

The present study draws on a hermeneutical perspective whereby teachers build up a self-image, and reveal it, and their history in the writing of the text (Coracini 2008; Momberger 2006). While writing and reflecting upon their own trajectory (either in a more introspective reflection or in the interaction with others), they become ‘actor-writers’ and foster their own sense of self-exploration based on their perceptions and observations (Josso 2002, 70–71). In doing so, they evoke significant moments of their professional trajectory along a time continuum of past, present and future.

Bearing in mind the theoretical background to the study, we decided to draw on the analysis of a teacher’s autobiographical documents, particularly the two personal characterisations (PC), which were more factual, and three WR. Our interest in the teacher’s *voice* intended to capture the personal meaning-making and the significance given to the professional learning experience fostered by the project. We considered such documents powerfully rich, enabling us to identify transformations in the teachers’ thinking, since we would have access to reflective processes of (re) organisation of the learning constructed during the workshop period, which could be set in an interpretive process of identity construction that slowly gains shape in the accounts (Momberger 2006). The study had the following guiding question: What transformations can be traced from the teacher’s narrative written accounts, and with which implications for her self-image and professional project?

As Punch (1998, 223) depicts, ‘In narrative analysis, form and content can be studied together’. For the purposes of the present article, we concentrated only on the content of the teacher’s WR, since we wanted to identify which topics would be the target of her attention when reflecting upon herself as teacher and her path in the project. Thus, while the PC were used to provide more specific information about the teacher, the narrative written accounts were analysed using content analysis procedures (Bardin 2000). In this sense, we followed two processes. Taking an emic perspective, we read the documents looking for thematic patterns, which were codified, refined and ultimately categorised (see Table 2). As such, these categories depict the major topics of reflection by the in-service language teacher. While doing this, we also paid attention to particular expressions or propositions that would indicate possible transitions or changes in her thinking, and would denounce possible change in perspective with regard to the teacher’s professional identity and mission as a language teacher. We were guided by Ginzburg’s (1989) perspective, which states that at this level of inference and interpretation, we can only identify clues and hints, since change is difficult to unveil and, consequently, statements about it need to be cautiously made.

## 4. Findings

The in-service teacher reported in this paper is a language teacher (English and French) in a secondary school, with a good deal of professional experience and a postgraduate qualification.

As referred to previously, she was a member of sub-group 2, ‘Languages and cultures: migrations and (mis)encounters’. Recognising the relevance of this topic in the context of an inclusive intercultural education, this sub-group sets itself the task to know how to approach, in the school context, the theme of migration in order to create an environment that values linguistic and cultural diversity. To this end, they

Table 2. Categories of analysis (adapted from Andrade and Pinho 2010b).

Topics of reflection	Reference ...
1. Language(s)	... to languages as objects to be analysed, mastered, taught; to the dimensions of languages, their functions and status; to their place in the world and the diversity that characterises them
2. Language learning process	... to the specificity of the learning process/verbal acquisition – strategies; processes; theories
3. Pedagogical and didactic knowledge	... to educational and didactic theories; to a didactic repertoire; to knowledge necessary for the exercise of the profession
4. Close or distant contexts	... to the contexts surrounding the subject, to the intervention community and the aspects that determine it
5. School and educational functions	... to the school as an institution and its role in the education of its citizens
6. Others	... to those who work in or determine the educational act – teacher educators, colleagues, parents ...
7. Teacher education	... to the education process, aims, content, activities, assessment, qualities and capabilities required from the teachers-as-learners
8. Oneself	... (reflection about) oneself, revealing self-knowledge, awareness of own values, capacities, wishes ...

considered it relevant to understand the pupils' representations of migration, of different cultures and peoples and, finally, how they see language in the social integration of migrants.

This sub-group developed didactic projects at different levels of education (8th and 10th grades) and in different language classes (French, Spanish and English). The aim of these intervention projects was to educate for citizenship, diversity and solidarity by promoting a critical reflection upon stereotypes and representations of migrants, languages and cultures. In addition, they sought to find out about the problems faced by migrants, the importance of inclusion policies and practices, as well as to help identify solutions to be adopted for inclusion within the school.

The teacher's involvement in the project 'Languages and education' comes from her constant search for opportunities for professional development:

Professionally I have always tried to keep up to date with regard to scientific and teaching developments: reading, activities/workshops, participation and colloquia/conferences, taking an MA. [...]. I try to find strategies, resources, better/more understanding to be able to act in a more conscious and informed way (initial PC). She participates in education processes 'always believing that I'll get to learn and share experiences and knowledge with others'. (initial PC)

The involvement in the project's collaborative learning context influenced the teacher's professional learning and consequently the projection of identity in view of plurilingual and intercultural education. The WR demonstrate that all this experience helped her cover particular topics, such as language(s), the language learning

process, pedagogical content knowledge, Others, teacher education and oneself. She tries to make new meaning of those topics, in order to situate herself within a 'new' discourse about language education and her teaching profession.

#### **4.1. *Language(s) and the Language learning process***

The common global theme chosen for the work of the WGA causes this teacher to reflect on the role of the language teacher in relation to languages as object(s) of teaching/learning. The next excerpts are examples of how the teacher becomes aware of the need to expand her fields of action, by providing greater articulation between the various language areas in the sense of finding alternative, more intercultural and plurilingual language teaching styles:

It bothers me the urge to find a balance between the need to change and the inoperativeness to act. Yet, I've been thinking about teaching practices in terms of a plurilingual education (...), trying to optimize resources that the proximity between them represents. (1st WR)

Why specifically 'Sensitization and Plurilingual and Intercultural Education'? I believe, today, this is the great challenge for language teachers: How to teach, develop and evaluate the plurilingual and intercultural competence of learners? Therefore, the desire to gain insight and be more informed about intercultural and plurilingual competence, so that I can act accordingly in the classroom. (2nd WR)

On the basis of social and political challenges, to which she acknowledges the key role of languages, this teacher admits that there is little real contact between teachers, and looks critically at the school organisation and its defining teaching objectives:

In fact, within a framework of European integration and globalization, it means a great deal of sense to speak of a languages educator. Yet, it seems to me that, from what I have seen, we are still only teachers of particular languages. This happens despite research contributions in this area [plurilingual and intercultural education], the current trends of language policies, the theoretical and methodological changes in the texts that regulate the language programs, and changes in schools at the level of curricular organization, which allows the existence of a language coordinator to bring together all the languages taught at school. (1st WR)

We still tend to pay little attention to our colleagues and other language teachers around us, and we continue to pursue our educational objectives, and, in the field of foreign languages, we still want to produce polyglots who can dominate all the communication skills correctly. (1st WR)

During this learning period, this teacher also reflects upon her knowledge about the process of language learning, and assigns other attributes, 'I recognise that learning languages is also learning about the other, it means learning to accept and value the other' (3rd WR). The idea of greater articulation between languages conveyed in earlier passages is reinforced in a final moment of the education process, when mention is made of the integration of other modes of thinking about linguistic learning experiences and of fostering them in the classroom:

I also know that languages are not watertight spaces, closed, hence the importance of turning to strategies which facilitate their understanding, their learning, such as the valuing of previous language learning experiences, the intercomprehension approach ... (3rd WR)

#### **4.2. Pedagogical and didactic knowledge**

Stimulated by the reflection related to *Language(s)* and the *Language learning process*, the teacher also revises her *pedagogical and didactic knowledge*, showing greater awareness that her knowledge needs to be (re)constructed and that she needs to try out new teaching practices, in order to achieve her emerging professional project in the scope of plurilingual and intercultural education. As the following excerpt illustrates, she realises that she needs to overcome some barriers such as routines and a certain conformism, so that she can learn and operate some changes in her teaching, this teacher said,

I've been thinking about teaching practices in terms of a plurilingual education, wanting (not always successfully) students to enjoy languages, trying to explore the cultural and educational potential of languages, trying to optimize resources that the proximity between them represents ... However, I feel that I still have a long way to go to become a teacher that educates for languages. Tradition is a heavy weight; routine is a friend of conformism and change is slow, winding, full of 'traps' ... But I believe that the willingness to change is challenging and so, here I am. I need more insight into plurilingual education, about linguistic and cultural diversity to be able to (re)construct knowledge and (re)think practices. (1st WR)

She looks critically at the teaching she has done, recognising the need to bring about change:

I feel responsible for not promoting more systematic work in the classroom. I am stuck between the awareness that we must act and an inability to react. Applying the words of Porcher to my everyday teaching, what sort of teaching do I do that involves plurilingualism and interculturality? A 'passive' way of teaching, occasionally touching on the idea of the proximity/transparency between languages and/or on their potential in terms of cultural and developmental issues? Or an 'active' teaching, thinking of lessons within projects, working on aspects of plurilingualism and interculturality in a planned and organized way? I categorize myself firmly as the first type. (2nd WR)

Aware of the fact that she still has a long way to go, this teacher is able to find a sense of direction in her professional development, and expresses a desire to take part in education programmes that will help her to develop pedagogical and didactic knowledge in relation to linguistic diversity, and to plurilingual and intercultural competence. As she explains,

But I believe that the desire to change is challenging, and therefore, here I am. I need to develop knowledge about plurilingual education, about linguistic and cultural diversity, in order to (re)construct *savoirs*, (re)think practices. (1st WR)

To this purpose, she acknowledges the crucial role of the relational dimension of her learning, as the following section depicts.

### 4.3. Others

The relationship with others – in this case essentially within the collaborative education programme – is mentioned quite a lot by this teacher, a process that seems to lead to a more effective professional development, which is important to the reconstruction process of teachers' self-image. She was pleased with the

opportunity to improve and develop my collaborative skills, my research and my self-reflection. I liked the idea that sharing information and practices would be an asset for my personal growth. I liked the idea that the combination of different opinions and experiences concerning research and teaching practices (university and schools) is a positive contribution towards giving up habits and renewing practices. (1st WR)

Also, the teacher seems to come to value professional knowledge constructed through research done in collaboration with teacher educators from university as a way to make transformations: 'this dialogue between research, teaching and practice is important for us to gain professional confidence, to find courage, to (re)think and to (re)construct our action' (2nd WR).

Looking back, she is aware of the contribution of fellow teachers and teacher educators for the construction of her personal and professional know-how, within a shared, negotiated and dynamic work culture, as this passage demonstrates:

I miss the WGA, the initial constraints, the participants, the different reasons why we had come together, the novelty factor, the organization, the work groups, the deviations, the corrections ... the concern of a colleague as she looked forward to everything being shared, discussed, negotiated, adjusted to the multiple interests Life's journeys are like this, and missing all this is the first sign that it was worth it! (3rd WR)

### 4.4. Teacher education

This teacher's reflection on her involvement in the education programme mainly focuses on its inherent characteristics and how it was a comfort zone for joint experimentation with other modes of thinking and taking action with respect to language education. In her own words, 'I have learnt to get to know people and professionals from other settings and together we had the same concerns, we got engaged in the collaborative search for new paths, we learnt to share the same theories' (2nd WR). Throughout this period of time, she clearly demonstrates the value she assigns to a collaborative way of professional learning, perceived as a place of refuge to be able to speak, learn and reconstruct what is important in terms of practice and improvements in the school: 'I don't want to stop this kind of training. I feel so good when I'm there! ... working in the group! ...' (2nd WR).

This teacher identifies those education strategies that she values most for her professional development, and is very aware of the possibilities that can lead to different ways of be(com)ing a language teacher:

The methodology used in the WG sessions is intended to enhance and empower each and everyone of the participants, allowing us to express our opinions: brainstorming, work presentations, the critical friend approach, taking the minutes ... Besides, the way the WGA was put together underlines the importance of working together collaboratively, 'building and sharing information', accountability: transparency and objectivity in the process (what is aimed at, how to carry it out, how it is evaluated), the involvement of the group in the discussion of the criteria for the organization and

evaluation of the portfolio, systematization of the work carried out on the part of the participants of the sessions, the teams made of teachers of different educational institutions, the constant use of *moodle* to retrieve information ... (1st WR)

Consequently, she concludes that one of her main acquisitions was that

teacher education in collaborative communities, in which we are all sat at the table – schoolteachers, teacher educators, researchers –, the menu is written with the combination of everybody's tastes, who invest their knowledge, experience, time, energy and willingness in a common project. (3rd WR)

#### **4.5. Oneself**

All along this education period, she has been taking stock of her personal and professional history, constructing other meanings, knowing that her own story is in permanent reconstruction:

Taking part in this education program despite my long period of time in teaching means that I consider my professional development is still unfinished and I always believe in the possibilities of improvement, of (re)constructing knowledge and practices. (2nd WR)

Furthermore, she acknowledges that the experience per se isn't enough in the processes of professional development and construction of identity: 'It is, therefore, with the belief that years of experience are not the necessary basis per se for learning and development of professional skills that I find myself here' (2nd R).

She analyses herself; identifying qualities to be developed in view of the type of education programme she was getting involved in, such as capacity of time management and organisation – 'Worries? Time! Time! Time! Or my (in)ability to manage my working life and personal life with that of teacher-as-learner. But I will improve!' (1st WR). Or even the ability to reveal one's thoughts to another person (teacher, teacher educator, or researcher), to be subject to others' questioning, and share experiences without fear:

I managed to overcome my inhibitions with regard to working online, although it was too late, when I decided to publish my opinions. I realize now that shyness about sharing intimate details of our professional life deprives us of feelings of safety, comfort, solidarity, because we are not alone! And this was another part of my learning! (3rd WR)

In the 'final' stage of the education programme, the teacher identifies the kind of learning that has helped her define her *mission* as a teacher and map out her professional project:

How I am different now? I realized that language learning begins before schooling and that we, teachers, should capitalise on this fact in the learning process of other languages, also valuing the [learners'] mother tongue. I realized that the school has the primary responsibility of valuing the linguistic background of each individual and then to enhance his/her competences, also considering that all knowledge of languages deserves social recognition. I understood that my future action can be anchored on sensitization to languages and cultures, while as before I thought that I should only 'teach' a language. The didactic project was enlightened me about the possibilities of how pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures can concur to the global formation of the



individual. Finally, I realized that [all this] is dependent upon the teacher's attitude: languages are to be 'loved' and my mission is to sensitize learners to linguistic and cultural diversity as a social reality and a European value. (3rd WR)

She now seems able to anticipate future scenarios, with a commitment to transform not only the classroom, but also the school itself:

My first challenge will be to try to go about things in a different way, based on sharing and participation, in our department of languages. If plurilingual education implies reconstituting the linguistic and cultural unity of individual speakers through the diversity of their repertoire of languages, we have to begin by working towards the idea of convergence [...] My wish is to 'borrow' the dynamic methods used in the collaborative education program and try to adapt them to the school, since the departments come together to have meetings almost only because of organizational matters and also to comply with the calendar. It will be difficult to change, make transformations, I know! But we have to start somewhere, taking one step at a time ...! (3rd WR)

In short, the analysis of this teacher's WR tried to demonstrate a multi-dimensional identity construction process based not only on her (re)constructed professional knowledge, but also on the way she reinterprets herself, in a process of conscious analysis of her own trajectory within the project 'Languages and education'.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we set out to analyse the path of a particular language teacher in the project 'Languages and education' from her own *voice*. It is perceptible that at the end of the project this teacher aspires to 'write' a new professional story, because in her discourse she projects a different identity as language teacher in the scope of plurilingual and intercultural education. In this sense, by means of narration the teacher was able to re-configure her experience and identify intentional continuities and discontinuities in terms of her own professional mission and project (Josso 2002; Ricoeur 1990), trying to find some coherence in a dialogue with the characteristics and possibilities of her teaching context (Rodgers and Scott 2008). Because she is more aware of herself as teacher with regard to her particular professional context and plurilingual and intercultural education, she seems to have taken steps to become a 'self-authoring knower' (Rodgers and Scott 2008, 740). The teacher seems to be able to identify some of the forces that hinder (conformism, isolation, closed perspectives of the language curriculum, school culture ...) and enhance (collaboration with other educational actors, reinforcement of her pedagogical and didactic knowledge, self-awareness and direction ...) her professional project, and how she is being shaped by them. Progressively, she is able to define where she stands and where she wishes to be.

In this sense, in her 'unfinished' story, she is willing to include other professionals that work with her in the educational community, at school, and with whom new working dynamics need to be created, hence recognising the relational dimension of her identity construction (Craig 2011; Dubar 1996). The encounters with other colleagues in the project, such as the schoolteachers and teacher educators or researchers, and the collaborative practices carried out, helped her understand that her own transformation as language teacher inter-depends upon working with the school as a whole and with its actors, particularly with those she relates to and works with. As

Wenger (1998) and Westheimer (2008) assert, collective learning contexts can be catalysts for knowledge construction, meaning-making, risk-taking and change. As already mentioned, such dialogue with others seems to have become a way to reflect upon the hindering factors and thus figure out ways of managing the curriculum towards a more plurilingual and intercultural education in this teacher's future. It may be a hint that this teacher realises the importance of being exposed to different perspectives from her own and is capable of integrating others in her professional project, so that she can fulfil her ambited mission (Josso 2002; Rodgers and Scott 2008). Also, in spite of keeping a line of continuity in terms of identity (Ricoeur 1990), she acknowledges other possibilities in her trajectory as teacher, namely due to the use of other languages which she had previously had no experience of. She understands better how plurilingualism can be fostered in a school context.

Yet, these results have to be seen in the timeline of the teacher's professional learning project, and more particularly within a particular learning context. The findings highlight the possibilities of a new linguistic and professional biography, which seems to be made possible by means of collaborative work towards more plurilingual educational environments. But they also show the need to go further in terms of research into professional learning trajectories towards plurilingualism and plurilingual education, as well as in the creation of education opportunities to make such trajectories happen.

Having access to teachers' personal trajectories by means of narrative accounts can be a tool to understand the effect of particular teacher education landscapes or scenarios to teachers' professional learning and future change in their teaching (Clandinin and Connelly 1995, 2000; Craig 2011; Rodgers and Scott 2008). A similar collaborative learning scenario can lead to different identity paths, as we believe it to be the case of the project 'Languages and education'. Yet, following a 'social ecology of learning' (Alheit 2009), such personal trajectories, and the strands of narrative connections and resonances in diverse narratives (Conle 1996), can be used to feed and recreate that same scenario, so that it can be simultaneously significant to the single teacher and the whole group.

The theoretical underpinnings of the present article and the case under analysis here enable us to reflect upon how collaborative teacher education scenarios in general may foster teachers' personal professional learning and renewed self-images. With such purpose, it seems to be important that collaborative teacher education towards plurilingual and intercultural education creates opportunities, namely, for teachers to:

- have new theoretical tools to think of their teaching practice and to learn how to organise an education for plurilingualism;
- be aware of how they can pedagogically act in different ways, and understand the reasons for those new ways of acting;
- expand the possibilities of their fields of action, identify interconnections between the teaching of the different languages and understand how more integrated practices can be developed;
- face and deal with the personal and collective challenges emerging from plurilingual and intercultural education, and the effects it has on their cultures of work and broadening of educational contexts;
- reflect on teaching traditions and routines, and on how these may be fostering or hindering plurilingual and intercultural education;

- come together and engage in an open dialogue, express their feelings and interests, and share their teaching practices without feeling the anxiety of being judged or criticised;
- work collaboratively around common interests and projects;
- reflect, both individually and with others, about their trajectories and how these are part of broader landscapes, which they need to understand and discover how to reshape;
- cast seeds of willingness to change and to identify the direction of such change;
- get involved in dynamics that bring together research and teaching in order to support innovative language education.

Ultimately, this case study puts in evidence the fact that teacher education scenarios need to be rich and diversified in terms of dynamics, methodologies, strategies and tasks since these may have more or less striking effects according to each teacher's trajectory (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Craig 2011; Rodgers and Scott 2008). In this line of thought, the challenge seems to be how to find room for unique personal development according to one's own projected professional identity in the context of social networks.

Consequently, in the context of a narrative and biographical perspective of teacher education, teachers' biographical trajectory and the training/learning choices made throughout their journey need to be the core of collaborative learning scenarios (Clandinin and Connelly 1995; Craig 2011). It is important when the written accounts are shared not only with the teacher educators, but also with the other schoolteachers. Accordingly, such accounts should be the target of analytical collaborative discussion and moments of joint awareness of particular routes to be taken, in particular with regard to the integration of new theories and practices in teaching and linguistic-communicative repertoires (knowing how to think and knowing how to act), but also of knowing how to be (Pinho et al. 2011).

Bearing this in mind, we need to look critically at the dialogic dynamics between teacher educators/researchers and schoolteachers in the production of narrative written accounts in the context of this project. Although there was the attempt to do that during the time span of the project, we must acknowledge that such dialogue around the WR was confined to the relationship between the schoolteacher and the researcher/teacher educator, who played the role of critical friend and provided feedback to guide the schoolteacher. It would have been richer to expand this dyadic forum and create more collective reflection, discussion and commentaries around the narrative extracts. As Smith (2011) explains, such a route would open the way to more dialogic interactions and collective (self-)knowledge capital, as well as database of case stories that can be explored together (Clandinin and Connelly 1995). In our perspective, it would also help to build a shared professional discourse, which may become more intelligible to all actors in the field of language education. Besides, in the context of the ideals of professional learning communities, such narrative sharing could foster coalescence between its members, and help to build a common valued vision and mission (Wenger 1998).

To conclude, this study aims to make a contribution to the construction of 'a careful and systematic theory of *biographical learning*' (Alheit and Dausien (2006) in collaborative teacher education in the field of plurilingual and intercultural education. This study strengthens a desire to move towards an understanding of what

happens from the biographical point of view of those involved (teachers, teacher educators and researchers) in collaborative learning scenarios, and taking into account the personal meanings of the conflicts that arise in terms of language choice, curriculum management and between cultures of thought and practice. Eventually, collaboration depends on what each individual thinks, believes in and experiences.

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